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ABSTRACT

This Child Development Associate (CDA) training module, was designed to provide the CDA intern with knowledge of how to establish grouping patterns which meet the program objectives, the teacher's objectives, and the children's needs. Objectives are presented along with suggested activities for achieving each objective, and an assessment checklist. Factors which must be considered when grouping children for activities in the early childhood center such as children's age, children's previous experience, center's facilities, types of materials, teacher and program objectives, and composition of the group are emphasized in a study guide. Resources for further study along with supplemental material are included. (Author/MP)

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Competency Based Training Module #6

LARGE AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

by

Ann Migliaro

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NOTE TO THE INTERN:

This CDA training module has been prepared as a guide for you and your CDA Advisor to help you to develop certain practical skills necessary for your work in an early childhood center. Although it contains many useful ideas, it is not intended to be a self-study program. Many decisions about your training experiences are left up to you and your CDA Advisor. The activities given in this module are "suggested" activities, and should be used if they are appropriate to your learning needs. You or your Advisor may come up with other activities more appropriate for your particular situation, children, or background of experience and training.

Your Advisor will evaluate your performance in each of the objectives. S/he may do so right away on the basis of skills you already have, or s/he may evaluate you after you have done some learning activities, or both. If you think you already have the skills required by some of the objectives, you should ask to be evaluated right away. You may not have to do any activities for some of the objectives. You do, however, have to demonstrate the required skills for your advisor; you cannot just tell s/him that you have the skills. If your advisor has already observed some of the skills before you entered this module, s/he may check you off on those skills without further observation.

When your Advisor has evaluated your performance in an objective area as satisfactory, s/he will initial and date that objective as completed in your copy of this module. When all of the objectives have been initialled, you have completed the requirements of this module and have earned credit. Keep this module as your permanent record of completion, and as a reference to use in your classroom.

As you can see, how fast you are able to complete this module depends on a lot of things: how much time and effort you can put into it; how much help your Advisor can give you; how much experience and training you have already had.

The Arizona/Nevada HSST/CDA Program hopes that you find your participation in CDA a valuable and practical training experience. We would appreciate any suggestions you may have for improvements in the training program and in this module.

CDA TRAINING MODULE #6

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This Module relates to the following CDA Functional Areas:

9 - Individual Strength

10 - Social

11 - Group Management

13 - Staff

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LARGE AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

Group activities in a preschool program should be designed to meet the program objectives, the teacher's objectives, and the needs of the children in the center. The size and type of groups used in the center should help the children develop socially, intellectually, physically, and emotionally.

Whenever possible, the children should be allowed to group themselves; to select their own activities and their partners in activities. The teacher should group the children by ability if the activity requires similar ability levels.

In order to create grouping patterns which facilitate the children's development, the teacher should be aware of both the group needs and the individual needs of the children in the center. Groupings should be made according to the identified needs, with grouping patterns changing as needs change.

Transitions can add to the effectiveness of group activities by helping both children and staff members begin a new activity with enthusiasm. Smooth transitions can help keep discipline problems to a minimum and allow new activities to begin with the full attention and cooperation of children and staff.

It is the purpose of this module to help the intern to establish grouping patterns which are effective for the children in the center and to develop those techniques needed for smooth transitions.

OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES, ASSESSMENT

CDA Intern's Name_____

Date of Entry_____Date of Completion_____

OBJECTIVES	SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES	ASSESSMENT
1. The intern will <u>define</u> large and small groups according to type of activity and materials used.	1. Read The Study Guide. a. Discuss with your advisor some general guidelines used to determine group size for specific activities. b. List all the activities which take place regularly in your center in the appropriate columns on the chart provided in the Supplement. Discuss with your advisor. Are there some activities which may take place either in small or large groups? Are there any which may take place either individually or in small groups?	_____ date/initial
2. The intern will <u>identify</u> individual and group needs of children within the center.	2. Refer to Section II-A and B of the Study Guide. a. Observe the children in your center and identify needs of individual children which should be considered when grouping children for activities. Discuss your observations for grouping with your advisor. b. Observe the children in your center and identify group needs of the children. Discuss your observations and their implications for grouping with your advisor.	_____ date/initial

OBJECTIVES	SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES	ASSESSMENT
3. The intern will group children according to the identified needs of the children for specific activities.	3. Refer to Section II-C of the Study Guide. a. Discuss with your advisor how the groupings which are used in your center are meeting the individual and group needs of the children. If it is decided that some changes are needed to successfully meet the children's needs, make these changes and evaluate their effectiveness with your advisor.	date/initial
4. The intern will provide dynamic groupings as needs change.	4. Discuss with your advisor what behaviors may be possible indicators that children are not being grouped to meet their needs. a. Observe the children in group activities for indications that changes in grouping patterns or group composition are needed. Discuss your observations with your advisor and make the indicated changes in groupings. Evaluate the effect of these changes.	date/initial
5. The intern will provide balance of groupings and activities which meet the identified needs.	5. Refer to Section III of the Study Guide. a. Observe the grouping patterns used in your center. Discuss these patterns with your advisor. b. Discuss with your advisor how program objectives are being met through group activities. If needed changes are indicated, make these changes and evaluate their effect with your advisor.	date/initial

OBJECTIVES	SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES	ASSESSMENT
6. The intern will use those techniques necessary for smooth <u>transitions</u> throughout the program day.	6. Refer to Section IV of the Study Guide. a. Observe the way in which transitions occur in your center. Evaluate these with your advisor. b. 1) Identify any problems that are occuring during the transitions in your center. Discuss with your advisor the possible reasons for these problems and how they might be solved. 2) Try the solutions which you have discussed. Evaluate their effectiveness with your advisor.	_____ date/initial

LARGE AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

STUDY GUIDE

I. Many factors must be considered when grouping children for activities in the early childhood center:

A. Whenever possible, children should be allowed to select their own groups and activities. This should be done any time an activity is offered which does not require grouping by developmental level. (Example: working with clay, which may be manipulated by children at all different levels with equal enjoyment.) The materials may be set out and the children told that they may work with them if they want. The size of the group may need to be controlled by taking one group of interested children first and telling the others that they will be given a turn later.

B. The age of the children and their previous group experience will affect the group size. Children are not born with the social skills necessary to cooperate in a group; these skills must be learned and developed. Younger children need rather small groups, while older children are able to function effectively in larger groups.

C. The facilities of the center will affect not only the total number of children in the center but also the number of children who can participate together in an activity. For example, if there is no large open space in the center, the number of children who are able to participate in a creative movement activity at the same time will need to be limited. Similarly, the number of children who are able to build with blocks at the same time will need to be limited by the floor space available for block-building.

D. Materials also need to be considered when determining group size.

1. The quantity of materials in a center will sometimes limit the group size for activities. If the center has only one easel, for example, it is apparent that the number of children who may paint at the easel must be limited.

2. The types of materials which are used in an activity also need to be considered when determining group size.

a. If the materials require that children use specific skills, group size should be kept small enough so that the teacher is able to give individual help. If the required skills are difficult, the teacher may even want to limit the group size to one child so that he/she may give that child the individual attention required for the child to master the skill. Examples: commercial games, picture dominoes, sequencing games.

b. If materials require a certain number of children, the size of the group should reflect this. Examples: commercial games such as Gandyland, Winnie-the-Pooh, Chutes and Ladders.

c. If the materials or equipment being used for an activity can be dangerous, group size should be limited to a number which can be easily supervised. Example: woodworking.

d. If the materials are to be used creatively or have built-in feedback for the children, group size needs to be limited only by quantity of materials available and the amount of space available. Examples: creative media, Montessori materials, pegboards, beads for stringing, etc.

e. The amount of experience the children have had with the materials will also affect the group size. If unfamiliar materials are introduced, a small group of less than five children will give the children a greater opportunity to explore the materials more fully.

f. Some materials are intended to be used by only one child. A group of children may be working in the manipulative area at the same time, but all of the children may be working at a different task. A group such as this, where parallel play is going on rather than cooperative play, should be kept small enough so that the adult(s) supervising the group can give individual attention and encouragement when children need it.

E. The teacher's objectives for activities will often give clues to appropriate group size.

1. Some objectives are best met by individual or small group (five children or less) activities.

a. Skills which are isolated for learning are best suited to small groups or individuals. These would include such things as learning to use scissors, or learning to recognize certain shapes or numbers. If the group is too large, it is not possible for the teacher to give adequate guidance and help to individual children so that they are able to master the skill.

b. Activities which are intended to give children a chance to explore, experiment, observe, and question for themselves should be conducted on an individual basis. Although a small group may be sharing a particular area of the room during these activities, this type of activity should be done by each child rather than as a group effort. An adult should be available to help these children when and if they need it.

2. Some objectives may be accomplished in large groups (more than five children). However, twenty to twenty-five preschoolers is about the maximum size for any large group activity.

a. Group discussions in which information, ideas, or feelings are shared are very valuable experiences for preschool children. The leader in these group experiences must insure that each child who has something to say is given the opportunity to make his contribution. Much of the value is lost if only two or three children are allowed to participate actively. Eight to ten children is a workable size for this type of discussion.

b. Some problems which arise in the center are best solved by having all of the children participate in a session of group problem-solving.

c. Active games, creative movement activities, field trips, and many special events in the center can effectively include the total group.

d. Large group activities are an excellent means of helping children develop social skills. Children must have the opportunity to practice those skills which are important to get along well in a group.

3. Some activity areas lend themselves well to any sized group. The specific activity and the moods and interests of the children will determine the group sizes for these activities.

a. Creative activities, such as art, music and creative dance, and dramatic play, lend themselves well to groups of any size. Even one child can enjoy an activity which gives him the opportunity to express himself freely.

b. Books and stories also can be chosen so that they appeal to groups of all sizes. There are some books which are best when shared with only a few children at a time. Others may be enjoyed by any number of children.

F. As a general guideline for determining group size, teachers should make sure that each child in the group is given the opportunity to participate in the activity planned for that group without having to wait. If the group is so large that only a few children are able to participate while the other children watch, the group is too large for that activity.

II. The composition of the group(s) is also important.

A. The center staff should be aware of the needs of the group as a whole.

1. Preschool children have a need to become autonomous, to be able to work and play independently. If the children in the center have had little opportunity to develop this independence, many activities for individuals and very small groups which require parallel rather than cooperative efforts should be provided.

2. Preschoolers also have the need for other people, to become a social person who can get along well in a group. If the children have not had much experience in a group situation, the center's program should provide many cooperative group activities, starting with rather small groups and steadily increasing the group size as social skills develop.

B. The staff must also identify the skills and needs of each individual child in the center. Careful observations will help the staff to plan activities which will meet the needs of each child. (For more detailed information, see Modules #8, Observing Individual Children; #9, Comparing Observations with Recognized Developmental Norms; #21, Providing for Individual Differences; and #13, Communication and Language Skills.)

1. Children who need help in developing skills should receive this help individually or in a small group of less than five children.

2. Children who display forms of behavior disorders, such as hyperactivity or high distractibility, may benefit most by beginning to work individually on structured activities. As the children gain more control, they may be included in very small groups (two or three children), with the group size increasing with their progress.

3. The developmental level of each child must also be determined by observations. Development progresses at a different rate for each child and for each area of development. A "normal" four-year-old may have the physical skills of a six-year-old, the language skills of a three-year-old, and the social skills of a four-year-old. Children who are the same age are not necessarily at the same developmental level.

4. All people have a different tolerance for frustrations, and frustration level is an important factor to consider when grouping children for activities.

5. Each child has some special needs. Some children will need a special friend with them in order to function well in an activity; others may have a great need for the attention of an adult which they do not have to share with other children. In order to meet these needs, center staff must be aware of them.

C. Children should be grouped for activities according to their needs.

1. The groupings of the children should be dynamic.

a. Children's needs change as they grow and develop. As needs change, groupings should also change.

b. A child is not at the same level of development in all developmental areas. Therefore, a child may need to be with different groups of children for different activities.

2. Each child should be assured of a high degree of success in the activities of his group. Constant failure can lead to a very low self-concept.

3. Each child should also receive some challenge from the activities which his group does. Without challenge, no progress is ever made, but the challenge must be realistic for the children's abilities.

4. Groups should not be labelled in a way which implies that one group is slow or special and another groups is fast. The accomplishments of groups should not be compared.

III. There should be a balance of group activities in the center program.

A. The center program should include individual activities, large group activities, and small group activities in a balance that will meet the needs of the children in the center and will meet the center's program objectives.

B. Groups should be formed in a variety of ways.

1. The children should be allowed to choose group membership for any activities which do not require grouping by developmental level. Just as adults have special friends, children have preferences for playmates and should not be expected to feel the same toward all other children.

2. Some activities can allow for choice of membership with certain limits, such as size of a particular group.

3. For some activities, the teacher should assign children to groups so that special needs are met.

4. Children should never be forced to participate in any activity. If a child does not want to participate in an activity, give him other alternatives which will not interfere with the activity. Example: A child who does not want to play "musical chairs" with the rest of the children may be allowed to go to the book area and look at a book quietly, or may be allowed to stand out of the way and watch the activity.

C. Group activities should provide a variety of structure and supervision.

1. Some activities, especially those which isolate certain skills, will be highly structured by the teacher's direction.

2. The way in which equipment and materials are arranged may give activities structure (see Module #3, Planned Arrangements and Schedules). This is a structure imposed indirectly by the teacher, and the activities need not be directed by the teacher.

3. The materials themselves provide structure for other activities. The teacher need not take direct part in these activities, but he/she should be available to give help as requested.

4. Creative activities are unstructured, leaving the children free to structure the activities as they desire.

D. Group activities should include activities which provide cooperative group experiences and experiences in which group members work side-by-side but independently (parallel).

IV. Smooth transitions between group activities will avoid many discipline problems and allow both children and staff to enjoy the beginning of a new activity.

A. Children will be more willing to change activities if they are given time to complete the activity at which they have been working. Give children at least one warning that it is almost time to change activities; sometimes it is even better to give a five-minute warning and a two-minute warning. Some teachers find that a clean-up song serves as a more effective warning that it is time to change activities.

B. Children will often be reluctant to leave an activity unless they know that they will be able to come back to it. Often a large project, such as an elaborate block structure, can be left as it is until the children are able to come back either to do more work or just to admire it again. Small projects can be put in the children's cubbies or on a shelf until they are able to return to them.

C. Adults in the center should reinforce the announcement of a transition by beginning to put materials away or by offering to help the children put away their materials.

D. Enough time to put away materials that were being used should be allowed.

E. Plan to have something for the children who are quickly finished with their pick-up tasks while waiting for the other children to finish.

1. If a total group activity is to follow, one adult may lead some group singing or plan to have a simple game such as "I Spy" until all of the children are ready.

2. If small group activities which do not require cooperative group effort are to follow, the adult who is to supervise each group should have materilas ready so that children may begin the activity as they arrive in the group.

3. If small group activities which require cooperative group effort are to follow, the adult who is to supervise each group should have the materials and equipment needed ready to begin the new activity as soon as all children in that group are ready. The time between the first child's arrival and the last child's arrival is a good time for conversation. Activities done as a group should not be started until the whole group is together.

F. If transitions occur between small group activities, each adult in the center should know how children will change groups. If the adults know which children go to what groups, they are able to guide the children into the groups where they belong.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Baker, Katherine Read. IDEAS THAT WORK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN. Washington, D.C., National Association for Education of Young Children, 1972, pp. 13-19.

2. Pitcher, Evelyn Goodenough; Lasher, Mariam G.; Feinberg, Sylvia G.; & Braun, Linda Abrams. HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN. Columbus, Charles Merrill Publishing Co., 1974, pp. 2, 58, 114, 152.

3. Read, Katherine H. THE NURSERY SCHOOL: A HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS LABORATORY. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders Co., 1971, pp. 27-28.

LARGE AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES - SUPPLEMENT

List the activities in your center in the appropriate column.

INDIVIDUAL	SMALL GROUP	LARGE GROUP